

**STATEMENT OF
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U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, REGION 5
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Good morning, I am Pat Bamford, Chief of the Acquisition and Assistance Branch in the Resources Management Division of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Region 5 office in Chicago. I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the work of the Agency in assisting small business enterprises in our region.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight EPA's efforts to include small businesses in the procurement process. The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) partners with the Agency's contracting activities "...to support the protection of the environment and human health by fostering opportunities for partnerships and contracts...for small and economically disadvantaged concerns." The OSDBU mission statement is at <http://www.epa.gov/osdbu/mission.htm>. Small businesses play an important role in helping the Agency to protect human health and the environment.

In Region 5, we have awarded three major emergency and rapid response services (ERRS) contracts. Two of these contracts have been awarded to small business concerns. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, small businesses received 71% of the total dollars obligated for ERRS contracts. If we include the subcontracts awarded by the large business contractor, small businesses received 83% of the total dollars obligated for ERRS contracts. Small businesses supply us with many of the items needed to carry out our environmental and counter-terrorism missions on a daily basis.

BACKGROUND

Over the last few years, we have tried to develop a good understanding of the major problems facing small businesses in their efforts to obtain contracts with the Agency. We have worked hard to increase the number of procurement opportunities available to small businesses. In FY 2003, the Agency's small business goal was 23.5%. The Agency awarded over 31% of our net obligations to small business concerns. In the same year, Region 5 awarded over 34% of our net obligations to small

businesses. EPA's goal for FY 2004 is to award 27% of the available procurement dollars to small businesses. We are confident we will continue to surpass that goal.

The Agency's policy is to develop programs to stimulate and improve the involvement of small and socioeconomically disadvantaged businesses in the overall acquisition process. We participate in one-on-one counseling sessions and small business outreach activities. We review business capability statements and provide a variety of avenues for small businesses to obtain guidance on business management and marketing techniques. For example, at the Agency level, we have held workshops on Best Procurement Practices for the Small Disadvantaged Business; Business Management and Organization Techniques; Marketing Strategies and Access Assistance; and How to Analyze a Solicitation for Effective Response. These are just a few of the initiatives taken to improve small business participation in Agency procurements.

RECENT ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE SMALL BUSINESS ACCESS

The President's Small Business Initiative calls for the Agency to improve small business access to government contracts by:

- Ensuring that agency contracts are open to all small businesses that can meet the agency's needs; and
- Avoiding unnecessary contract bundling.

The Agency is taking several steps to address these initiatives. We are reviewing acquisitions in excess of \$2 million to determine if our needs are being bundled. This also includes reviewing proposed orders to be placed against other agencies' contracts, including multiple award schedules. These reviews will enable our Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Specialists to propose alternative contract strategies to ensure that small businesses are considered. We are also working with our program offices to break out work that is suitable for small businesses. For example, in Region 5, we have broken out Superfund sampling work from our Remedial Action Contracts (RACS).

Weston Solutions, one of our prime RACS contractors, has a Mentor-Protégé agreement with Environmental Design International, Inc. (EDI). EDI is participating in the SBA's 8(a) program and has been certified as a small, disadvantaged, woman-owned business that is located in a historically underutilized business zone (HUBZone). When Weston received work assignments that included environmental sampling, they subcontracted this work to EDI. When Region 5 was reviewing environmental work that would be suitable for small business participation, environmental sampling was chosen as a candidate. We developed a requirement and were able to negotiate and award a new contract to EDI because of the experience and knowledge they had gained under their mentor-protégé relationship with Weston. This contract is being utilized by

Superfund program personnel and is a great success.

We are complying with the requirement to ensure that all vendors seeking to do business with the Agency are listed in the government-wide Central Contractor Registry (CCR), formerly the Pro-Net database. All small businesses seeking contracts from the Agency must be registered in CCR. This database will be instrumental in assisting us in locating small businesses that have the necessary capabilities to participate in our procurement opportunities.

The Agency also posts information about its upcoming procurement opportunities for the current and next fiscal year on the Internet. All current solicitations in excess of \$100,000.00 are posted on a web page, along with the synopsis and sources sought notices, and information about the status of the current solicitations is provided at www.epa.gov/osdbu/contracts.htm. All Agency procurement opportunities in excess of \$10,000.00 are posted at FedBizOpps (www.FedBizOpps.gov). Vendors can register at FedBizOpps to receive notices about new procurement opportunities being announced by EPA.

Headquarters, along with our regional offices, have Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Representatives assigned to assist small businesses in their pursuit of agency contracts. These specialists coordinate business presentations with our procurement and program personnel. They conduct on-site business fairs and are the advocates for small businesses in the Agency, consulting with them on their capability statements and overall marketing strategy. This effort helps prepare them to be more competitive when seeking Agency contracts.

OSDBU also prepares, publishes and posts on the Internet information designed to inform the small business community about doing business with us. Among these materials are booklets like "Doing Business with EPA" and the "Mentor-Protégé Program." Small businesses can review these publications on the Internet at www.epa.gov/osdbu/pubs.htm or can order them from EPA at www.epa.gov/osdbu/requests.htm. We also offer publications to enable our large business contractors to locate small businesses for subcontracting opportunities, such as: the "Women Owned Directory" and the "Suggested Resources for Identifying Small, Minority, and Women-owned Businesses." Generally, EPA is working to simplify the process of accessing information of import to small business over the Internet through our Small Business Gateway (<http://www.epa.gov/smallbusiness/>). The Gateway includes links not only to our OSDBU, but also to our Small Business Ombudsman, the Small Business Innovation Research program, and many other programs and items of interest to small businesses.

SUMMARY

We have worked hard to ensure that small businesses have the opportunity to contribute their skills, talents, and expertise to furthering our mission to protect human health and the environment, and we are pleased to report that we have exceeded our small business goals in recent years. Moreover, we expect our recently implemented programs to help us achieve even greater participation by small businesses in EPA's procurement process in the years to come.

I want to reiterate EPA's commitment to ensuring that small businesses have equal opportunities to participate in the Agency's procurement process. I look forward to playing a key role in working with the small business community in Region 5 to ensure that they become active participants in assisting us to fulfill our environmental mission.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.